

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A control apparatus which controls first and second electronic devices, comprising:

5 means for assigning first and second electronic mail addresses to the first and second electronic devices, respectively;

10 a receiving unit which receives an electronic mail via a network, the electronic mail including one of the first and second electronic mail addresses as a destination address;

means for selecting one of the first and second electronic devices in accordance with the destination address of the received electronic mail; and

15 means for controlling an operation of the selected electronic device based on an instruction described in the received electronic mail.

2. The control apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

20 a storage unit which stores access control information indicating a relationship between an electronic mail address of each user who gains access to the control apparatus and an electronic device that is controllable by the user; and

25 means for performing an access control process which allows the electronic device selected in accordance with the destination address to be controlled or inhibits the electronic device from being

controlled, based on a sender address and the destination address of the received electronic mail and the access control information.

3. The control apparatus according to claim 1,
5 wherein the controlling means includes:

means for generating a command, which is interpreted by the selected electronic device, based on the instruction described in the received electronic mail; and

10 means for sending the command to the selected electronic device.

4. The control apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the controlling means includes:

15 means for analyzing a message composed in the received electronic mail to extract a keyword, which is available as the instruction, from the message;

means for generating a command, which is interpreted by the selected electronic device, based on the extracted keyword; and

20 means for sending the command to the selected electronic device.

5. The control apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the first electronic device is configured to record a broadcast program, and

25 the controlling means includes:

means for analyzing a message composed in the received electronic mail including the first electronic

mail address as a destination address to extract a keyword, which is available as an instruction to show a broadcast program to be recorded, from the message;

means for predicting contents of the instruction
5 based on both the extracted keyword and a database indicating broadcast date and time, a channel number and an attribute of each broadcast program; and

means for controlling a recording operation of the first electronic device based on prediction results.

10 6. The control apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the controlling means includes:

means for analyzing a message composed in the received electronic mail to predict contents of the instruction described in the received electronic mail;

15 means for composing a message indicating the predicted contents of the instruction; and

means for returning an electronic mail including the composed message to a sender of the received electronic mail.

20 7. A method of controlling first and second electronic devices, comprising:

assigning first and second electronic mail addresses to the first and second electronic devices, respectively;

25 receiving an electronic mail via a network, the electronic mail including one of the first and second electronic mail addresses as a destination address;

selecting an electronic device to be controlled from the first and second electronic devices in accordance with the destination address of the received electronic mail; and

5 controlling an operation of the selected electronic device based on an instruction described in the received electronic mail.

8. The method according to claim 7, further comprising:

10 generating access control information indicating a relationship between an electronic mail address of each user who gains access to a control apparatus, which controls the first and second electronic devices, via the network and an electronic device that is
15 controllable by the user; and

 performing an access control process which allows the electronic device selected in accordance with the destination address to be controlled or inhibits the electronic device from being controlled, based on a
20 sender address and the destination address of the received electronic mail and the access control information.

9. The method according to claim 7, wherein the controlling includes:

25 generating a command, which is interpreted by the selected electronic device, based on the instruction described in the received electronic mail; and

sending the command to the selected electronic device.

10. The method according to claim 7, wherein the controlling includes:

5 analyzing a message composed in the received electronic mail to extract a keyword, which is available as the instruction, from the message;

 generating a command, which is interpreted by the selected electronic device, based on the extracted
10 keyword; and

 sending the command to the selected electronic device.

11. The method according to claim 7, wherein the first electronic device is configured to record a
15 broadcast program, and

 the controlling includes:

 analyzing a message composed in the received electronic mail including the first electronic mail address as a destination address to extract a keyword,
20 which is available as an instruction to show a broadcast program to be recorded, from the message;

 predicting contents of the instruction based on both the extracted keyword and a database indicating broadcast date and time, a channel number and an
25 attribute of each broadcast program; and

 controlling a recording operation of the first electronic device based on prediction results.

12. The method according to claim 7, wherein the controlling includes:

analyzing a message composed in the received electronic mail to predict contents of the instruction
5 described in the received electronic mail;

composing a message indicating the predicted contents of the instruction; and

returning an electronic mail including the composed message to a sender of the received electronic
10 mail.